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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1994-1995

PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Comprehensive study on conference services

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In paragraph 42 of its resolution 48/228 of 23 December 1993, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to submit to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session a comprehensive study on the organization, management and human resources requirements for the provision of adequate conference services as a basis for the consideration of his proposals for the regular budget for the biennium 1996-1997". The study requested has been undertaken with the assistance of an independent consultant engaged by the Department of Administration and Management and the full involvement of the Office of Conference and Support Services. Because of time and resource constraints, the study concentrated on conference services at Headquarters, although the findings and recommendations are considered generally applicable to United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna as well.

2. The study found that the demand for conference services has increased significantly since 1991 and exceeds the capacity of Conference Services at the present level of staff and other resources. The study identified certain measures that could improve the productivity and efficiency of the management of conference-servicing resources and stressed the need for improved communications between Conference Services and those submitting materials to be processed or using the services provided by Conference Services. Many of the recommendations of the study are now being acted upon, and the findings and recommendations of

the study will also be taken into account in the preparation of the proposed programme budget for 1996-1997.

A. Definitions

3. The present study has been based upon a definition of conference services as those services required for the conduct of conferences and meetings and for the issuance of documents relating to such meetings. In accordance with the medium-term plan for 1992-1997, 1/ the general aims of Conference Services as an organizational unit can be described as follows:

> "To provide to the organs of the United Nations, other intergovernmental bodies and their respective subsidiary bodies the services required for the efficient and effective conduct of their meetings and conferences in a manner that makes optimum and most cost-effective use of the conference-servicing resources and facilities available worldwide;
>
> "To develop and plan, for submission to the Committee on Conferences, a proposed calendar of meetings for the Organization that adheres to the resolutions [of intergovernmental bodies] and to the rules and principles of conference planning and that is designed so as to make the most cost-effective use, world wide, of conference-servicing resources, centres and facilities;
>
> "To ensure the quality, timely issuance, availability and wide dissemination of documents and publications produced by the Organization to Member States and other users in a variety of readily accessible forms; and
>
> "To ensure adherence to the procedures established for the control and limitation of documentation in material submitted for processing."

Conference services comprise planning, meetings servicing, interpretation, verbatim reporting, précis-writing, documents control, editing, reference and terminology, translation (including contractual translation), text-processing, copy preparation and proofreading, typographical design, desktop publishing, reproduction and distribution.

4. Conference services are placed at the disposal of intergovernmental and expert bodies to assist them to carry out their work and achieve their objectives. Therefore, conference services might be considered adequate if they permit Member States to meet in accordance with the approved calendar and to conduct deliberations on the matters they wish to consider. By this definition, the adequacy of conference services cannot and should not be measured by the outcome of the deliberations themselves; while inadequate conference services may prevent successful deliberations, adequate conference services, however defined, cannot ensure successful deliberations.

5. The study focuses attention on the following:

(a) Conference-servicing resources are limited and must be used in a cost-effective manner. There is a limit not only to the number of staff that can be

employed within the established budgetary allocations for conference-servicing but also to the capacity of this staff to meet the ever-increasing demand for services. There are also limits to the extent to which this capacity can be enhanced by the application of office automation technology, equipment and other technical resources;

(b) Services must be timely to be of value. Documents must be issued sufficiently in advance of the meeting at which the agenda item to which they relate will be considered to allow representatives of Member States to study them. All necessary services must be available at the scheduled starting time of a meeting;

(c) Services must be of the highest quality. To be of value to Member States and help intergovernmental bodies to achieve their objectives, conference services must be of the highest quality. The effective conduct of meetings requires the issuance of well-prepared documents in a timely fashion and the provision of high-quality interpretation and other services.

Therefore the task of providing adequate conference services requires maintaining an optimal balance among quality, timeliness and efficiency. High quality, timeliness and efficiency are all essential components of adequate conference-servicing. In the short term, because of resource constraints, limits to capacity, inadequate technical support or other factors, the high priority given to one component, such as timeliness, may adversely affect the other components. Nevertheless, the longer-term objective continues to be improvement in all three components.

B. Criteria

6. New, more appropriate criteria for measuring conference-servicing performance are being developed as a result of the study. These are considered below (see sect. III).

II. ORGANIZATION OF CONFERENCE SERVICES

A. Objectives

7. The organization of conference services must:

(a) Facilitate the efficient use of limited resources to provide high-quality services in a timely and effective manner to meet the requirements of United Nations conferences and meetings world wide;

(b) Permit clear assignment of responsibility and appropriate delegation of authority to programme managers, who will be held accountable for the achievement of set objectives within the resources provided;

(c) Establish clear lines of communication both internally and with other departments and offices;

(d) Encourage the exercise of initiative and flexibility necessary to respond to rapidly changing requirements for services;

(e) Encourage cooperation and coordination not only among conference-servicing units world wide but between Conference Services and other organizational units of the Secretariat as well as with intergovernmental bodies and representatives of Member States.

B. Present organizational structure

8. The organizational structure of Conference Services was revised in mid-1994 as proposed in the report of the Secretary-General on the reorganization of the Department of Administration and Management (A/C.5/48/72) and accepted by the General Assembly in its decision 48/491 of 14 July 1994. As described therein, the former Office of Conference Services and Office of General Services were combined to form the Office of Conference and Support Services, managed by an Assistant Secretary-General. The functional responsibilities of Conference Services involve essential functions for facilitating communication among Member States, and should contribute to the successful functioning of the United Nations and the perception of it as an efficient Organization. In his managerial responsibilities regarding Conference Services, the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference and Support Services is assisted by a Deputy at the Director level, responsible for supervising the services concerned on a day-to-day basis, directing the development of conference-servicing policies in the Organization and establishing procedures and practices for the provision of conference services at all locations. The organizational structure is slightly different at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna. In Geneva, the Conference Services Division, comprising the Conference Service, the Languages Service, the Interpretation Service, the Publishing Service and the Library, is separate from the Division of Administration; the Director of Conference Services reports directly to the Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva. In the proposed organization of a unified conference service at Vienna, conference services and administrative services are combined in a single Division of Administrative and Common Services (A/C.5/49/24). The organization of Conference Services at Headquarters is shown in annex 1 to the present report.

9. In all cases, however, Conference Services is organized on hierarchical and functional lines, with separate organizational units for each type of conference service. At Headquarters, these units are grouped in two main divisions: the Translation and Editorial Division and the Interpretation, Meetings and Documentation Division. Within the Office of the Director, senior staff supervise units for Central Planning and Coordination, Documents Control and the Technological Innovations Programme.

C. Analysis of organizational structure

10. The study analysed the internal organization of Conference Services and relations between Conference Services and other units of the Secretariat. The organization of Conference Services by function, with a separate unit

established to deal with each aspect of conference-servicing, brings the benefits of specialization and clear delineations of responsibility, authority and accountability. Such an organization facilitates the processing of documents and the servicing of meetings, avoiding overlapping of function or duplication of effort. Lines of communication are clear and direct, and there is appropriate delegation of authority to respond flexibly to changing requirements. Internal communications are good.

11. However, specialization and emphasis upon internal processing activities may detract attention from communication between units in Conference Services, with other units in the Secretariat and with users of conference services. The comprehensive review found a need for greater awareness on the part of Conference Services of the needs and concerns of the users of its services and those who supply materials for processing by Conference Services. There also appeared to be insufficient understanding by others, in some cases, of the requirements and capacities of Conference Services.

D. Proposals for improvement

12. As a result of the study, there is now greater recognition of the importance of strengthening communications between Conference Services and the rest of the Secretariat, as well as with representatives of Member States, in order to exchange information and take coordinated action to achieve common goals. Steps are therefore now being taken to establish networks linking the staff of Conference Services with other units of the Secretariat that either submit materials to Conference Services for processing or use the products of Conference Services and with Permanent Missions in respect of the servicing of intergovernmental bodies or expert groups.

13. These networks are intended to improve a variety of working relations between Conference Services and others. They would include departments that provide the manuscripts that Conference Services processes and secretariats of intergovernmental bodies, which are concerned with planning the work of those bodies and ensuring that the necessary documents and meetings services are provided in a timely and effective manner.

14. Consideration is being given to assigning to Conference Services staff special responsibility for services for specific intergovernmental bodies and expert groups and their related author departments. Rather than duplicating the work of committee secretaries and document coordinators in substantive departments, such officers would complement their work, relying on them to assess the requirements of the bodies and propose schedules for the submission and issuance of documents. This function would be coordinated by the Office of the Director.

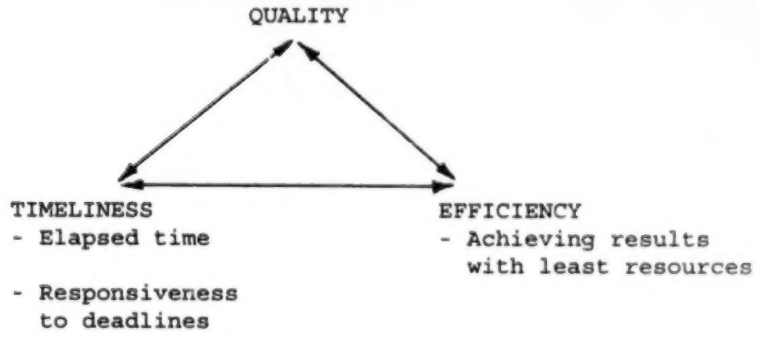
15. Actions to strengthen the central planning and coordinating capacities of the Office of the Director of Conference Services are under review, including the establishment of a group to coordinate the work of all conference centres in preparing for and servicing global conferences. In addition, a structure is being introduced to establish and develop continuous performance improvement functions.

III. MANAGEMENT OF CONFERENCE SERVICES

A. Objective

16. The objective in managing conference services is to use the relatively limited resources available so as to provide the services required with an optimal balance among quality, timeliness and efficiency. The challenge on a day-to-day basis is to make the right choices necessary for that balance. As indicated above, this implies being aware of the needs and priorities for each product and service provided. The long-term challenge is to improve quality, timeliness and efficiency through better systems, procedures and management.

Performance management



B. Analysis of present arrangements

1. Global management of conference-servicing resources

17. Although conference services at Geneva and Vienna are formally under the authority of the Directors-General of those Offices, the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference and Support Services and his deputy, the Director of Conference Services at Headquarters, have overall responsibility for the management of conference-servicing resources provided in section 25 E of the 1994-1995 programme budget: Conference services, New York, Geneva and Vienna. This responsibility involves the appointment and promotion of conference-servicing staff and coordination of conference-servicing activities world wide to ensure that optimum use is made of the available resources. The appointment and promotion of language staff at Headquarters, Geneva and Vienna is based upon recommendations made by the Director of Conference Services to the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference and Support Services. On behalf of the Director, the directors of divisions and chiefs of services at Headquarters maintain regular, close contact with their counterparts at Geneva, Vienna and other conference centres, coordinating plans and redeploying staff or work to make the best use of available capacities. Within the Office of the Director, the Coordinator of the Technological Innovations Programme at Headquarters maintains close contacts with his counterpart at Geneva to ensure compatibility of applications of computer technology and a consistent development strategy.

18. One of the main instruments for the global coordination of conference services is the calendar of United Nations conferences and meetings, prepared under the direction of the Chief, Planning and Meetings Servicing Section, who also serves as Secretary to the Committee on Conferences. The calendar is reviewed by the Committee on Conferences and submitted to the General Assembly for approval. A computer database for United Nations conferences and meetings is being established to facilitate coordination among conference centres and the preparation and implementation of the biennial calendar of conferences and meetings.

2. Management and coordination at Headquarters

19. At Headquarters, the work of the specialized functional units that provide conference services is coordinated through weekly meetings convened by the Directors of Division and by the Chief of Documents Control to plan the processing of documents and the servicing of meetings for the coming weeks. These meetings bring together the staff concerned from various organizational units to ensure that common priorities are agreed upon and appropriate resources are allocated for the timely completion of work.

3. Production line for processing documents

20. To cope efficiently with the high volume of documentation and the short deadlines for issuance, conference-servicing units form a production line, with priorities for processing established by Documents Control, in consultation with the secretariats of intergovernmental bodies and with processing units. Plans are being developed to strengthen the capacity of Documents Control to plan and monitor document production and to enforce rules on documentation.

21. In each processing unit, in order to process the manuscripts as quickly as possible, documents are often divided up among several staff members and reassembled at the stage of preparing camera-ready pages for reproduction. While production lines permit the efficient and rapid processing of documents, they require staff to work on a succession of portions of various documents, making it difficult for them to identify with the production of final documents. A single translator or text-processing operator is rarely responsible for the preparation of an entire document, which is often reviewed only at the stage of assembling camera-ready pages for reproduction. Often there is no opportunity for overall review of a lengthy document that has been translated by several self-revising translators.

4. Cooperation with other organizational units

22. Another goal of organizational arrangements is to encourage close cooperation not only among units of Conference Services but among all departments and offices concerned with the work of intergovernmental bodies and expert groups. Such cooperation is essential between the two parts of the Office of Conference and Support Services, but it is also very important in the case of other departments and offices. Although there are no formal

organizational arrangements for cooperation of this kind, there are daily contacts between Documents Control and the Planning and Meetings Services Section in Conference Services and substantive secretariats and author departments concerning the scheduling of documents processing and meetings of intergovernmental bodies. During the fall session of the General Assembly, there are also weekly coordination meetings of the staff of Conference Services and the General Assembly Secretariat Services Branch with the secretaries of the Main Committees to ensure the most effective and efficient use of available resources to meet the needs of the work of the Assembly. These weekly meetings, begun during the forty-eighth session, have proven to be useful.

5. Inadequacy of performance indicators

23. A programme of continuous improvement requires performance measurements that indicate the degree to which Conference Services is using resources efficiently and effectively to deliver, in a timely manner, high-quality services that meet the requirements of those for whom the services are being provided. The study found that workload statistics currently compiled are not very useful as performance indicators. They are not always consistent with each other, they are sometimes difficult to interpret, and they do not cover all the aspects of conference-servicing in which continuous improvements are sought. Output statistics for documentation, for example, record work done rather than final output; while this is useful for internal management purposes, it does not provide a clear picture of the number of pages of final documentation produced.

6. Failure of current workload statistics to measure demand

24. One of the most significant problems encountered is that current workload statistics cover only work completed, not incoming workload or the total demand for services. Documentation statistics report the volume of work done by various services in a given period, but not the volume of documentation submitted for processing. Consequently, backlogs of unprocessed documents are not reflected in the statistics for the period in which they should have been produced. Similarly, the numbers of meetings serviced, with or without interpretation, are reported, but not the total numbers of meetings requested. As a result, levels of demand for conference services are probably underestimated in current Conference Services statistics. Since there have been no measures of aggregate demand for services, it has been difficult to assess the extent to which the demands for services has exceeded the capacity of Conference Services to supply them.

7. Need to encourage more systematic teamwork

25. The ability of Conference Services to meet the demands for its services depends upon teamwork within the Secretariat and among its own work units. Teamwork is encouraged, and the study found that there is usually effective teamwork among the various units. However, as mentioned above, there has been no systematic measurement or analysis of team performance. The need for managers and staff to focus on immediate production may mean that opportunities

to improve teamwork are missed. In such cases, problems in the many working relations between units of Conference Services can remain hidden, masking extra work that may be required because one work unit did not provide its work product to the next unit in the best possible form.

8. Need for closer cooperation with departments and offices

26. In the current study of conference services, the need for close cooperation by Conference Services with the departments and offices concerned from the initial stages of preparation of a document has been emphasized as essential to the timely issuance of documents. Accurate advance information concerning the number, the complexity and the length of documents to be submitted to an intergovernmental body and the dates on which such documents will be submitted for processing is required by Conference Services. Unfortunately, this information is often not available. The study found that, although there may be reasonable coordination among document focal point managers in substantive departments, coordinating units (such as the Security Council Affairs Division, the General Assembly Secretariat Services Branch and the Division for Policy Coordination and Economic and Social Council Affairs) and Documents Control in Conference Services, such coordination is much too late for the teamwork and goal conformance needed throughout the United Nations to begin. It must start, at a minimum, with the authors of documents, and must be supported by the managers of author departments. Such coordination is particularly important in the case of bodies, such as the Security Council, that have an inherently unpredictable schedule of meetings and volume of documentation.

9. Need for better information on the costs of services

27. Effective management of conference-servicing resources requires an accurate knowledge of their costs. Better cost information on meetings and documentation is needed to give a more complete picture of the total costs involved and to improve budgeting for conference services. Better full-cost information is needed for different modes of work and for different workflows. Furthermore the effects on costs of the addition of work to or removal of work from Conference Services processing have not been thoroughly analysed. The study recommended that factors that cause different amounts of work to be done should be examined, and the resulting cost and time differences calculated, to assist in the identification of opportunities to reduce costs by eliminating rework and removing work from the conference-servicing processes. Under the budgetary procedure adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 41/213, provision is made in the programme budget for meetings programmed at the time of the preparation of the programme budget and also for meetings that would be authorized subsequently, on the assumption that the number and distribution of meetings would be consistent with the pattern of previous years. To the extent that, in a given biennium, the volume of meetings and documentation is higher than the pattern of previous years, this makes it difficult to satisfy the demands within the approved level of resources. This has been the case over the past five years. As a result of sustained increases in the number of meetings and the volume of documentation, capacity levels established on the basis of earlier experience have been consistently below actual requirements. Decisions

to add meetings to the approved calendar "within existing resources" have imposed burdens that conference Services has not been able to deal with adequately.

C. Proposals for improvement

1. New performance indicators

28. A series of workshops in Conference Services has resulted in the identification of 17 potential performance indicators that might be used in reporting to Member States in order to give a more comprehensive assessment of the work done in conference-servicing. These include indicators of timeliness, quality and efficiency, some of which will be based on surveys of delegations of Member States and substantive departments in the Secretariat. The proposed performance indicators also include seven indicators of demand, workload and capacity utilization. Following a period of testing in 1995 in New York and Geneva, during which indicators will be further refined, they will be applied during the 1996-1997 biennium.

29. The comprehensive study also highlighted the need to measure performance in ways that would reveal the nature of apparent productivity changes and internal performance differences among units with similar functions. For its internal reporting, Conference Services has identified specific management uses of performance data, such as improving resource allocation decisions, improving teamwork, or reducing rework, and is developing measurements relating to these issues.

2. Introduction of demand forecasting

Documentation

30. Any useful forecasting and advance scheduling of documentation workload requires realistic deadlines for authors, an earnest effort by author departments to meet deadlines, much earlier notice of changes in submission dates, and accuracy and timeliness in both forecasts and changes in forecasts. One approach to providing better advance information is for authors and their managers to project dates of key milestones before submission (completion of field research, receipt of responses from Member States, policy clearance of draft). Conference Services would receive reports on when those milestones are achieved or missed, and the impact of missing milestones on final submission dates. Reporting could be done electronically using project management software.

31. On the basis of an analysis of the actual patterns of incoming manuscripts and the time required for processing, a pilot project is being carried out to apply methods for project planning to establish realistic milestones for preparing documents before submission.

Meetings

32. In view of the many, varied and frequently changing requirements of intergovernmental bodies and expert groups, scheduling is not a one-time activity limited to the preparation of the biennial calendar of conferences and meetings; it is one of the most important ongoing functions of the staff of the Meetings Planning Unit of Conference Services, who work closely with the secretariats of intergovernmental bodies, chairmen of regional groups and others concerned with meetings-servicing and, on occasion with presiding officers, continuously adjusting meeting schedules and room assignments to ensure that as many bodies as possible can be suitably accommodated. Scheduling is particularly difficult in the case of meetings of regional groups. Although such meetings are to be serviced within existing resources, they are increasingly important for the work of the General Assembly. A computer database of calendars and meetings is being established, covering Geneva and Vienna as well as New York, and an analysis is being made of the patterns of actual demand for meetings services in order to identify measures that could reduce the level of uncertainty in planning and permit the most efficient use of limited resources.

3. Teamwork and closer cooperation with substantive secretariats and author departments

33. Improving teamwork is recognized as a continuous function, requiring actions as well as measurements, and steps have been initiated to improve teamwork at all levels: within the Office of Conference and Support Services, within the Department of Administration and Management, and within the Secretariat as a whole. Within Conference Services a network of staff in the various processing units has been established to improve internal working relations.

4. Continuous improvement

34. The study found that present workload standards tended to establish static performance goals and recommended that the most effective way to encourage improvement of services would be to use a system of "benchmarking", under which the services would make systematic comparisons and help each other to identify the best practices, which they could all adopt. Since benchmarking units compare processes and practices as well as performances, there could be good opportunities for even the highest performing unit to improve. To implement this recommendation, a series of workshops has been held within Conference Services and a system of benchmarking has been developed for use in the management of conference services.

35. A conference services improvement network has been established, and each organizational unit has begun to develop its own working procedures and modalities for the introduction of continuous improvement within the unit, to establish its own performance indicators, or "benchmarks", to determine what form improvements should take and to identify areas where improvements in working relationships between units would contribute to overall improvement.

Within each unit, a staff member has been designated to serve as a focal point for the network. These staff members will meet on a regular basis in meetings chaired by the Director of Conference Services for an exchange of views on actions taken in each unit to improve performance.

5. Measuring conference-servicing costs

36. Ways and means of recording and analysing the costs of conference-servicing are under consideration. These would cover the planning and preparation for conferences and meetings as well as the actual servicing of such meetings (including preparing and issuing the necessary documents).

6. Revised methods of workflow management

37. With improved forecasting, as described in paragraphs 30 to 32 above, it should be possible to revise the present methods of workflow management. The feasibility of moving to a "short-cycle" throughput for certain categories of pre-session documents is being examined. Special measures for dealing with documents, often completely unforeseen, that require immediate processing are also being explored. The database of the Documents Recording, Information and Tracking System (DRITS) will be used to produce more detailed performance reports for managers.

7. Application of new technologies to conference-servicing

38. The application of technological innovations in conference-servicing is continuing along the lines described in the medium-term plan for 1992-1997, bringing gains in the quality and timeliness of services and reducing costs. All text-processing units have completed their conversion to the use of networked computer workstations and text-processing software; desktop publishing capabilities have been established for English, French, Russian and Spanish languages in the Copy Preparation and Proofreading Section and will be developed in Arabic and Chinese; verbatim records and other official records are now prepared by verbatim reporters and official records editors on screen, using computer workstations and text-processing software; the processing of documents by Conference Services and the scheduling of interpreter assignments at Headquarters are done using computer databases and information systems; a computer database of terminology in all official languages of the United Nations is fully operational; all parliamentary documents produced in New York or Geneva are now being stored in electronic form on optical disk, to which access is being provided to Permanent Missions at New York and Geneva.

39. The comprehensive study supports the recommendations of two previously established internal Conference Services working groups dealing respectively with machine-assisted translation and with electronic documentation. Conference Services is now in the process of acquiring 120 computer workstations as the first step in providing all translators with automated equipment. Translators' workstations would be linked with those of text-processing units, editorial services and the Documentation, Reference and Terminology Section as well as

with other databases within and outside the United Nations system. The design of parliamentary documents is being revised to take account of both the requirements and the capabilities of text-processing software, and text-processing units are now preparing documents (such as the proposed programme budget) that previously required external typesetting. Upgraded desktop publishing equipment and software is being provided to the Copy Preparation and Proofreading Section, together with appropriate training, so that full desktop publishing capacities in all languages but Chinese (for which the necessary software is not yet available) will be established in the 1996-1997 biennium. The capacity of the optical disk system is being expanded to provide access to all Permanent Missions in New York and Geneva and to more Secretariat staff; further enhancement of the system, including its establishment at Vienna, will be needed in 1996-1997. In the reproduction and distribution areas, increased use is being made of bar-code technology for tracking work or measuring performance. Preliminary studies are now being made of the feasibility and desirability of procuring for the reproduction plant equipment that can produce plates from digital information, thus permitting the processing of documents from submission to reproduction in electronic form. Detailed proposals for the application of technological innovations to improve conference-servicing will be made in the proposed programme budget for 1996-1997.

IV. HUMAN RESOURCES REQUIREMENTS

A. Objective

40. In managing the staff of Conference Services, the objective is to ensure the availability of staff with the necessary skills and training to provide the required services to intergovernmental bodies and to make optimum use of such staff.

B. Present situation

1. Labour-intensive conference-servicing

41. Conference-servicing is very labour-intensive. Established posts for Conference Services account for about 20 per cent of the total number of established Secretariat posts financed from the regular budget for 1994-1995 (about 25 per cent of the posts in the Professional category and 18 per cent of the posts in the General Service category) and more than half of the established posts under part VIII, Common support services. The ratio of Professional category to General Service posts is higher than for the Secretariat as a whole (.88 as opposed to .63), reflecting the concentration of functions that require specialized Professional qualifications. Language posts in the Professional category (the great majority of posts in Conference Services) are filled on the basis of international competitive examinations, with successful candidates appointed for an initial probationary period of two years.

2. Capacity of established staffing levels

42. In recent years, the demand for services has increased, while the established staffing levels have decreased. The established practice has been to set staffing for conference services at levels with a capacity below expected levels of demand for conference-servicing, on the understanding that this capacity will be augmented as necessary by recruitment of staff for temporary assignments of short duration and by the contracting of work to external providers of languages services. Despite a variety of measures to increase productivity, particularly through increased self-revision by translators, it has become necessary to resort increasingly to staff recruited against temporary assistance funds and to external contractual services. Nevertheless, the number of non-calendar meetings for which services could not be provided has increased (see para. 44 (b)) and work had to be deferred on documents such as summary and verbatim records of meetings.

3. Levels and mix of conference-services staff

43. On the basis of a review of experience, estimates have been made of the demand for conference services since 1991 and of the extent to which there was the capacity to meet that demand. There has been a growing gap between the level of conference services demanded and the level of services the Secretariat was able to provide, despite measures by the Secretariat to improve planning and increase productivity. The practice has been to calculate conference-services requirements for each new biennium on the basis of average output figure for the previous five years. In a period of rising demand, this has led to a consistent underestimation of real demand and resource requirements.

44. In the case of meetings-servicing, analysis of data for meetings at Headquarters during the three-year period from July 1991 to July 1994 indicated the following:

(a) The total demand for meetings (the sum of meetings scheduled, reassignments, additions and meetings declined) has increased;

(b) The number of meetings for which services could not be provided rose from 57 in 1990 to 157 in 1993;

(c) The difference between the number of meetings scheduled and actual demand (as defined above) has decreased, suggesting that planning has improved on the part of both the Secretariat and intergovernmental bodies;

(d) The difference between the actual demand and the number of meetings serviced has increased, suggesting that demand increasingly exceeds capacity, even though capacity utilization has improved.

45. The reasons for these trends are still being analysed, but a preliminary conclusion is that three factors have contributed to greater utilization of meetings-servicing capacity:

(a) Improved organization of their programmes of work has enabled intergovernmental bodies to make more realistic initial estimates of their requirements;

(b) The Secretariat has also improved the reliability of its estimates of actual requirements (as indicated by a decrease in the difference between the number of meetings scheduled and the number of meetings actually serviced);

(c) There has been greater success in redeployment to other meetings of resources released by the cancellation of planned meetings (reflected in an increase in the utilization of capacity in the interpretation services from an average of about 77 per cent in 1991 to 88 per cent in 1993 and 93 per cent in the first half of 1994).

However, an offsetting factor, making it more difficult to provide all services requested, has been an increase in the number of unforeseen or ad hoc requests for meetings not included in the calendar. In addition, the level of activity of bodies such as the Security Council, the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has increased and many intergovernmental bodies have required parallel meetings not originally foreseen.

46. In the case of documentation, analysis of the data so far has indicated that:

(a) There has been an overall increase in the demand for documentation services;

(b) This demand has exceeded the capacity of established staffing levels, despite increases in productivity;

(c) Meeting this increased demand has required a greater reliance upon temporary assistance and contractual services.

47. The increased demand for documentation has been largely the consequence of an increase in documentation requirements of the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies, especially since 1992. In contractual translation, about two thirds of the work now consists of parliamentary documentation and one third publication, reversing the proportions of several years ago. The increasing use made of limited contractual translation resources for parliamentary documents was possible because, for a variety of reasons, the number of publications prepared by substantive departments had declined. However, this is likely to be a temporary situation that will not continue into the 1996-1997 biennium.

C. Proposals for improvement

1. Revision of levels and mix of conference-services staffing

48. Better measurements of real demand for conference services are being developed and will be analysed. New Performance indicators and cost measurement systems are also expected to provide better management tools and improve the

quality of budgetary analysis, facilitating the calculation of the overall level of staffing required and the most cost-effective combination of established and temporary staff and contractual services. In any calculation of the capacity of the Secretariat to meet the demand for conference services, several factors must be considered: the productivity rates of the services concerned, established staffing levels, available temporary assistance resources and the extent to which contractual services can be used to meet some requirements. The most appropriate combination of these depends on (a) what measures can be taken to improve the productivity and thus increase the output capacity of the services at present staffing levels; and (b) what is considered the most efficient mix of established posts, temporary assistance and contractual services in each function and language unit.

49. At the present stage, no major increases in capacity can be expected simply from measures to increase productivity. For example, the use of office automation equipment to assist translators will enhance the quality of their work but will not bring immediate gains in productivity. It is therefore necessary to estimate overall staffing requirements on the basis of experience since 1990 and projections of demand for services in 1996-1997, rather than only on previous output levels. This approach will be followed in preparing proposals for the programme budget for 1996-1997.

2. Increased training of staff

50. In addition to the problems of deciding upon the number of conference-servicing staff required and the most appropriate combination of established posts, temporary assistance and contractual services, it is essential that conference-servicing staff be given the training needed to work efficiently and effectively, providing the highest level of service to intergovernmental bodies and expert groups and making the most effective use of new technologies and techniques in the performance of their functions. The areas in which training needs have been identified include language training in additional passive languages to lessen dependence on temporary assistance over time and, in certain cases, in the actual language of work to ensure that the language used by those United Nations interpreters and translators in meetings and documents reflects terms and expressions currently used by the Member States concerned. In the area of computer and related new technology training, the introduction of on-screen translation will require translators to learn basic and advanced computer skills; copy preparers need to be trained in desktop publishing techniques to reduce reliance on external typesetting, and staff in the internal printing facility need to keep abreast of developments and trends in the printing industry to enhance the production of as many publications in house as possible. While some of these training requirements may be met in house, others will require funding for external studies. Conference Services has also begun to explore the possible redeployment of work among the various functional groups and will keep this possibility in mind as part of its continuing efforts to utilize existing resources to the maximum extent possible. Detailed recommendations on staff training will be included in the programme budget proposals for 1996-1997.

V. PHYSICAL FACILITIES

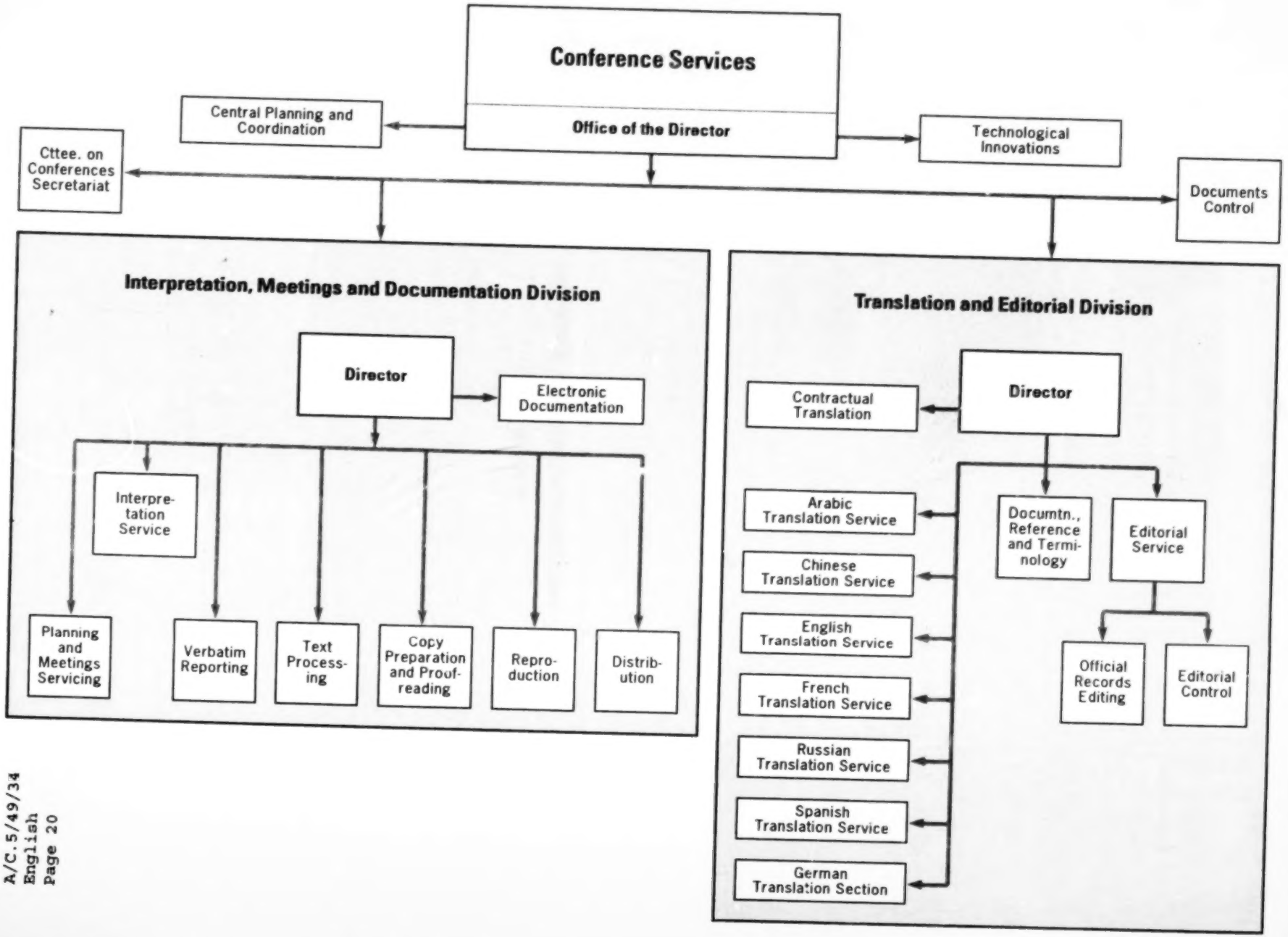
51. Although physical facilities were not specifically mentioned in the General Assembly resolution, the capacity to provide conference services is adversely affected by inadequate physical facilities for meetings. These include problems arising from the limited number of appropriate meeting rooms at Headquarters, the lack of electronic voting machines in some large meeting rooms, the need for upgrading of sound systems and the need for reconfiguration of meeting rooms to meet the changing requirements of intergovernmental bodies. There is also inadequate office space for conference-servicing staff.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/47/6/Rev.1), para. 39.4.

Annex I

CONFERENCE SERVICES ORGANIZATIONAL CHART


Conference Services
Office of the Director
Central Planning and Coordination
Technological Innovations
Cttee. on Conferences Secretariat
Documents Control
Interpretation, Meetings and Documentation Division
Director
Electronic Documentation
Interpre-tation Service
Planning and Meetings Servicing
Verbatim Reporting
Text Process-ing
Copy Preparation and Proof-reading
Repro-duction
Distrib-ution
Translation and Editorial Division
Director
Contractual Translation
Arabic Translation Service
Chinese Translation Service
English Translation Service
French Translation Service
Russian Translation Service
Spanish Translation Service
German Translation Section
Documtn., Reference and Termi-nology
Editorial Service
Official Records Editing
Editorial Control

Annex II

FIGURES

1. Comparison of output and resource levels for the bienniums 1984-1985 to 1992-1993

2. Contractual translation: distribution of work, 1992-1994

3. Meetings with verbatim records, 1990-1993

4. Meetings for which services could not be provided, 1990-1993

5. Interpreter assignments, 1991-1994

FIGURE 1
Comparison of output and resource levels
for the bienniums 1984–1985 to 1992–1993

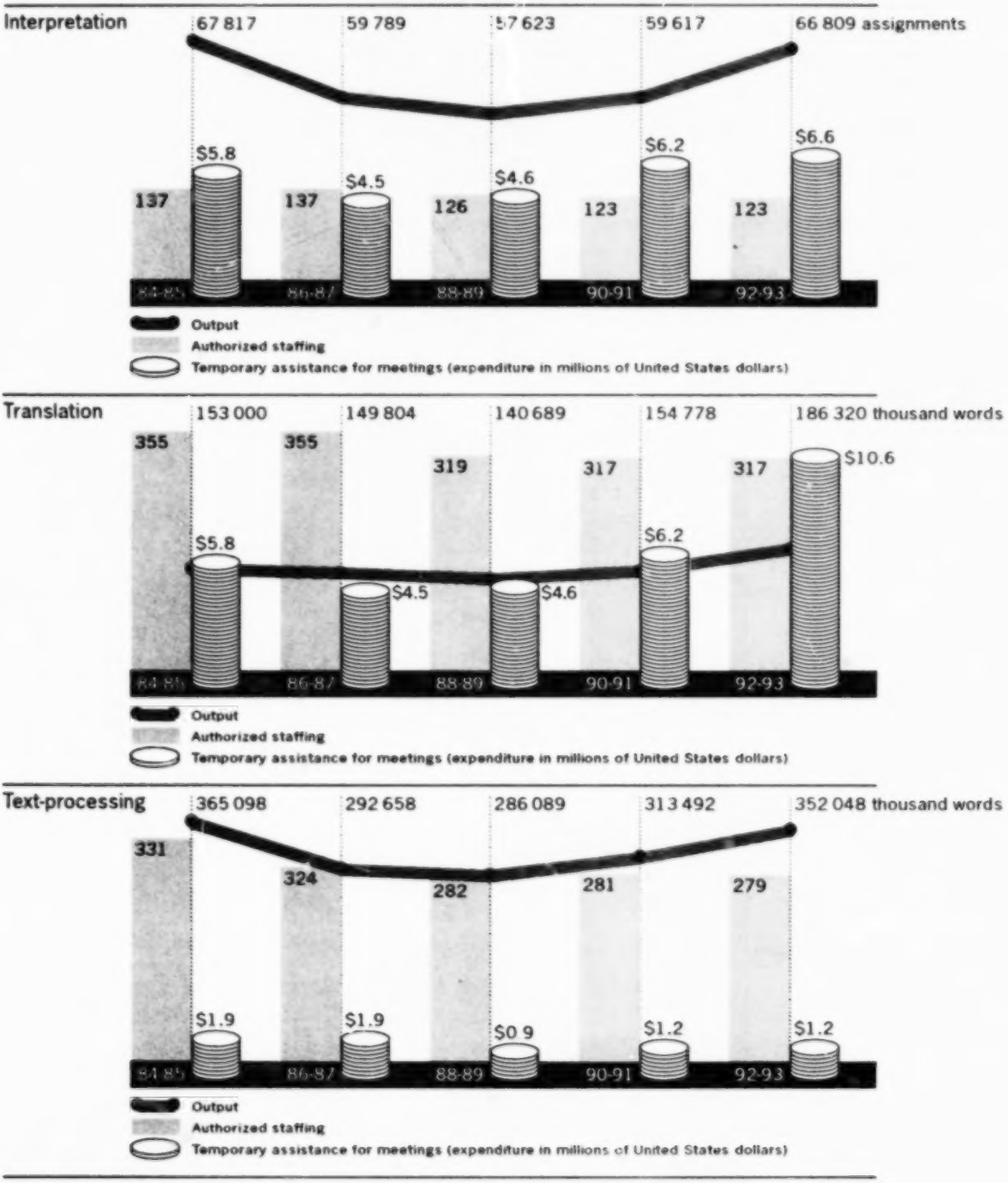


FIGURE 2
Contractual translation: distribution of work, 1992–1994

Percentage share

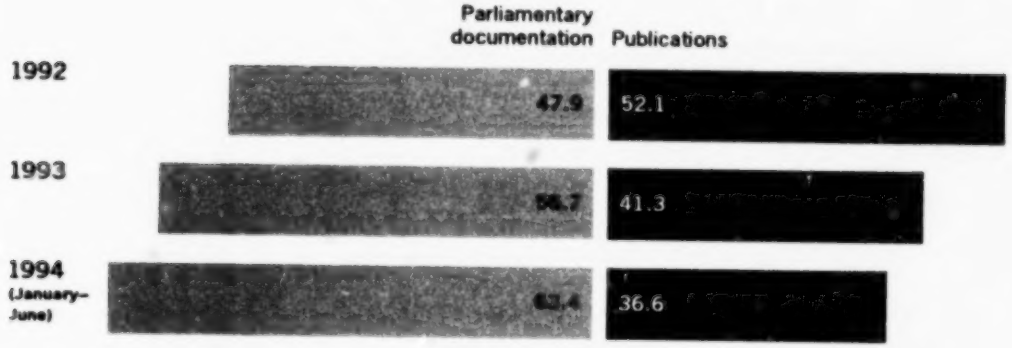


FIGURE 3
Meetings with verbatim records, 1990–1993

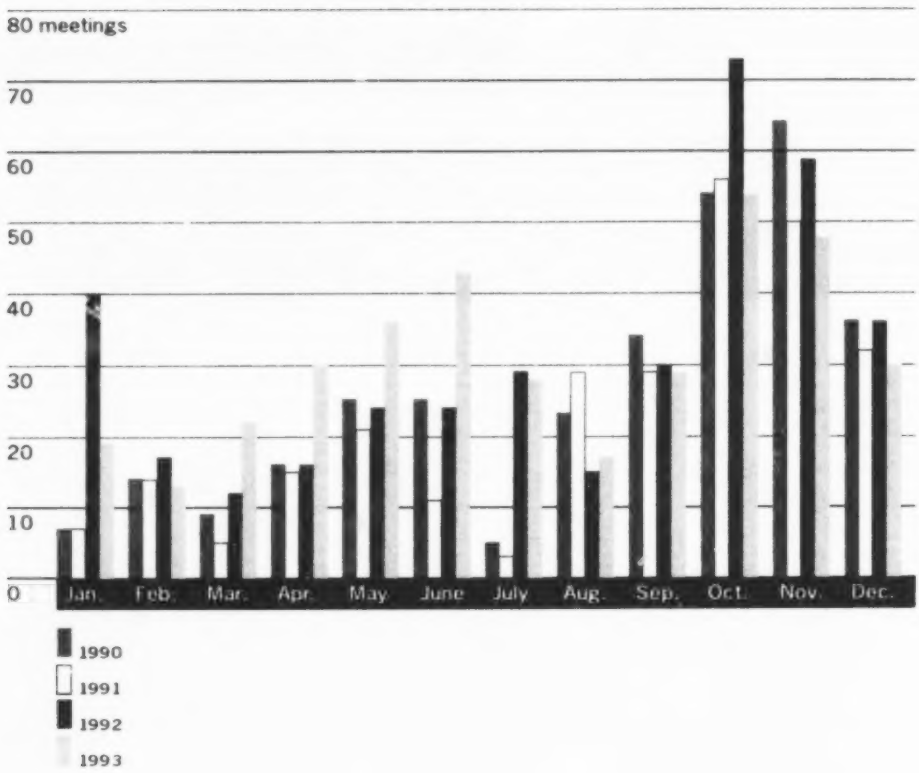


FIGURE 4
Meetings for which services could not be provided, 1990–1993
Cumulative number during year

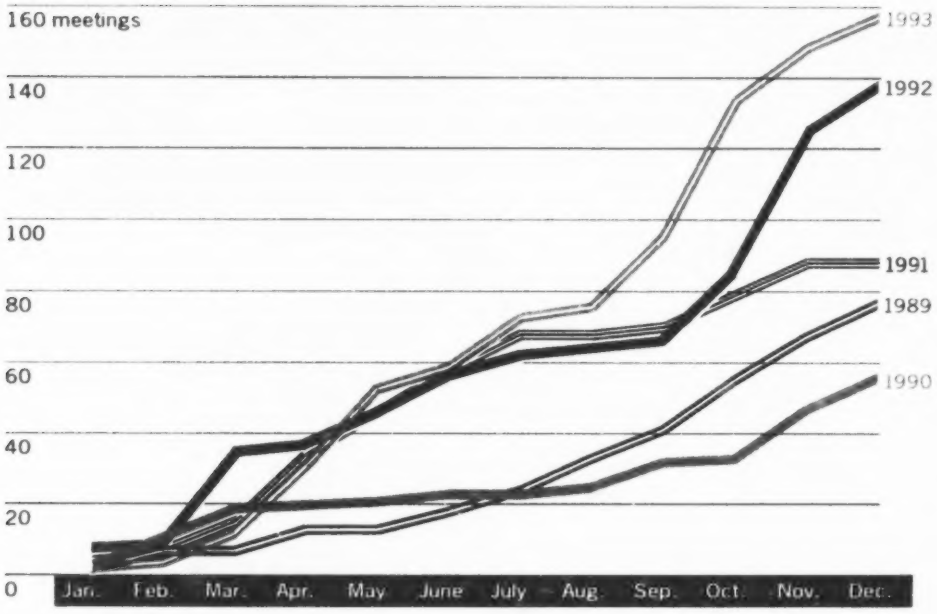


FIGURE 5
Interpreter assignments, 1991–1994